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DANTE.

BY JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

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DANTE.

DANTE (contracted from DURANTE) DEGLI ALIGHIERI, an Italian poet, born in Florence, May 14, 1265, died in Ravenna, September 14, 1321. His descent is said to have been derived from a younger son of the great Roman family of the Frangipani, classed by the popular rhyme with the Orsini and Colonnas:

"Colonna, Orsini e Frangipani
Prendono oggi e pagano domani."

That his ancestors had been long established in Florence is inferred from some expressions of the poet, and from their dwelling having been situated in the more ancient part of the city. The most important fact of his genealogy is, that he was of mixed race, the Alighieri being of Teutonic origin. It is supposed, from a passage in Boccaccio's Life of Dante, that Alighiero the father was still living when the poet was nine years old. If so, he must have died soon after, for Leonardo Aretino says Dante lost his father while yet a child. Of the order of Dante's studies nothing can be certainly affirmed. His biographers send him to Bologna, Padua, Paris, Naples, and even Oxford. All are doubtful, Paris and Oxford most of all, and the dates utterly undeterminable. As to the nature of his studies, there can be no doubt that he went through the *trivium* (grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy) of the then ordinary university course. To

these he afterward added painting, or at least drawing, theology, and medicine. He is said to have been the pupil of Cimabue, and was certainly the friend of Giotto, the designs for some of whose frescos at Assisi and elsewhere have been wrongly attributed to him. To prove his love of music, the episode of Casella were enough, even without Boccaccio's testimony. The range of Dante's acquirements would be encyclopædic in any age, but at that time it was literally possible to master all that was to be known, and he seems to have accomplished it. The *Convito* gives us a glance into Dante's library. We find Aristotle (whom he calls the philosopher, the master) cited 76 times; Cicero, 18; Albertus Magnus, 7; Boëthius, 6; Plato (at second hand), 4; Aquinas, Avicenna, Ptolemy, the Digest, Lucan, and Ovid, 3 each; Virgil, Juvenal, Statius, Seneca, and Horace, twice each; and Algazzali, Alfragan, Augustine, Livy, Orosius, and Homer (at second hand), once. Of Greek he seems to have understood little; of Hebrew and Arabic, a few words. But Dante acquired perhaps the better part of his education in the streets of Florence, and, later, in those wanderings which led him (as he says) wherever the Italian tongue was spoken. Nothing seems to have escaped his eye, or failed to be photographed upon his sensitive brain, to be afterward fixed forever in the *Commedia*.

The few well ascertained facts of Dante's life may be briefly stated. In 1274 he first saw Beatrice Portinari. In 1289 he fought at Campaldino on the side of the Guelphs, who there utterly routed the Ghibellines, and where, he says, "I was present, not a boy in arms, and where I felt much fear, but in the end the greatest pleasure from the various changes of the fight." In the same year he assisted at the siege and capture of Caprona. In 1290 died Beatrice, married to Simone dei Bardi, precisely when is uncertain, but before 1287, as appears by a mention of her in her father's will, bearing date January 15 of that year. Dante's own marriage

is assigned to various years, ranging from 1291 to 1294; but the earlier date seems the more probable, as he was the father of seven children (the youngest a daughter, named Beatrice) in 1301. His wife was Gemma dei Donati, and through her Dante, whose family was of the lesser nobility, became nearly connected with Corso Donati, the head of a powerful clan of the *grandi*, or greater nobles. In 1293 occurred what is called the revolution of Gian della Bella, in which the priors of the trades took the power into their own hands and made nobility a disqualification for office. A noble was defined to be any one who counted a knight among his ancestors. Della Bella was exiled in 1295, but the nobles did not regain their power. On the contrary, the citizens quarrelled among themselves, and subdivided into the *popolani grossi* and *popolani minuti*, or greater and lesser trades, a distinction of gentility somewhat like that between wholesale and retail tradesmen. The *grandi* continuing turbulent, many of the lesser nobility, among them Dante, drew over to the side of the citizens, and between 1297 and 1300 there is found inscribed in the book of the physicians and apothecaries, *Dante d' Aldighiero, degli Aldighieri, poeta fiorentino*. In 1300 we find him elected one of the priors of the city.

In order to a perfect misunderstanding of everything connected with the Florentine politics of this period, one has only to study the various histories. A few words, however, are necessary, if only to make the confusion palpable. The rival German families of Welfs and Waiblingens had given their names, softened into Guelfi and Ghibellini, to two parties in northern Italy, representing respectively the adherents of the Pope and of the Emperor, but serving very well as rallying points in all manner of subsidiary quarrels. The nobles, especially the greater ones, were commonly Ghibellines, or Imperialists; the bourgeoisie were very commonly Guelphs, or supporters of the Pope. Sometimes, indeed, the

party relation of nobles and burghers to each other was reversed; but the names Guelph and Ghibelline always substantially represented the same things. The family of Dante had been Guelph, but just before his assumption of the priorate a new complication had arisen. A family feud, beginning at the neighboring city of Pistoja, between the Cancellieri Neri and Cancellieri Bianchi, had extended to Florence, where the Guelphs took the part of the Neri and the Ghibellines that of the Bianchi. The city was instantly in a ferment of street brawls. Both parties appealed at different times to the Pope, who sent two ambassadors, first a bishop and then a cardinal. Both pacificators soon flung out again in a rage, after adding the new element of excommunication to the causes of confusion. It was in the midst of these things that Dante became one of the six priors (June, 1300), an office which the Florentines had made bimestrial, in order apparently to secure at least six constitutional chances of revolution in the year. He advised that the leaders of both parties should be banished to the frontiers, which was forthwith done, the ostracism including his relative Corso Donati among the Neri, and his most intimate friend, the poet Guido Cavalcanti, among the Bianchi. They were all permitted to return before long, but after Dante's term of office was over.

Affairs getting worse (1301), the Neri, with the connivance of the Pope (Boniface VIII.), entered into an arrangement with Charles of Valois, who was preparing an expedition to Italy. Dante was meanwhile sent on an embassy to Rome by the Bianchi, who still retained all the offices at Florence. It is the tradition that he said, in setting forth, "If I go, who remains? and if I stay, who goes?" Whether true or not, the story implies what was certainly true, that the counsel and influence of Dante were of great weight with the more moderate of both parties. On October 31, 1301, Charles took possession of Florence in the interest of the Neri. Dante being still at Rome (January 27, 1302), sentence of exile was

pronounced against him and others, with a heavy fine to be paid within two months; the charge against him being pecuniary malversation in office. The fine not paid (as it could not be without admitting the justice of the charges, which Dante scorned even to deny), in less than two months (March 10, 1302) a second sentence was registered, by which he with others was condemned to be burned alive if taken within the boundaries of the republic.

From this time the life of Dante becomes uncertain. He was now necessarily identified with his fellow exiles, and shared in their attempts to reinstate themselves by force of arms. He was one of their council of twelve, but withdrew from it on account of the folly of their measures. From the *Ottimo Comento*, written at least in part by a contemporary as early as 1333, we learn that Dante soon separated himself from his companions in misfortune, with mutual discontents and recriminations. During the nineteen years of his exile, it would be hard to say where he was not. In certain districts of northern Italy there is scarce a village that has not its tradition of him, authentic or otherwise; its *sedia*, *rocca*, *spelonca*, or *torre di Dante*. After his banishment we find a definite trace of him first at Arezzo with Ugucione della Faggiuola; then at Siena; then at Verona with the Scaligeri. By the election of the Emperor Henry VII. (of Luxemburg, November, 1308), and the news of his proposed expedition into Italy, the hopes of Dante were raised to the highest pitch. Henry entered Italy in October, 1310, and received the iron crown of Lombardy at Milan on the day of Epiphany, 1311. His movements being slow, and his policy undecided, Dante addressed him a famous letter, urging him to crush first the "Hydra and Myrrha" Florence, as the root of all the evils of Italy (April 16, 1311). To this year we must probably assign the new decree by which the seigniorship of Florence recalled a portion of the exiles, but excepted Dante and others by name. The undertaking of Henry, after an ill-

directed dawdling of two years, ended in his death at Buon-convento, August 24, 1313.

According to Balbo, Dante spent the time from August, 1313, to November, 1314, in Pisa and Lucca, and then took refuge at Verona with Can Grande della Scala, where he remained till 1318. Foscolo with equal positiveness sends him, immediately after the death of Henry, to Guido da Polenta at Ravenna, and makes him join Can Grande only after the latter became captain of the Ghibelline league in December, 1318. In 1316 the government of Florence issued a new decree allowing the exiles to return on conditions of fine and penance. Dante rejected the offer in an indignant letter, saying: "Is this then the glorious recall of Dante Alighieri to his country, after nearly three lustres of suffering exile? Did an innocence patent to all merit this? This, the perpetual sweat and toil of study? Far from a man, the housemate of philosophy, be so rash and earthen-hearted a humility as to allow himself to be offered up bound, like a schoolboy or a criminal! Far from a man, the preacher of justice, to pay those who have done him wrong as for a favor! This is not the way of returning to my country; but if another can be found that shall not derogate from the fame and honor of Dante, that I will take with no lagging steps. For if by none such Florence may be entered, by me then never! Can I not everywhere behold the mirrors of the sun and stars? — speculate on sweetest truths under any sky, without first giving myself up inglorious, nay, ignominious, to the populace and city of Florence? Nor shall I want for bread." Whatever the date of Dante's visit to Can Grande, or the length of his stay with him, it is certain that he was in Ravenna in 1320, and that, on his return thither from an embassy to Venice, he died in 1321. He was buried at Ravenna under a monument built by his friend, Guido Novello. Dante is said to have dictated the following inscription for it on his deathbed: —

JVRA MONARCHIÆ SVPEROS PHLEGETHONTA LACVSQVE
 LVSTRANDO CECINI VOLVERVNT FATA QVOVSQVE
 SED QVIA PARS CESSIT MELIORIBVS HOSPITA CASTRIS
 AVCTOREMQVE SVVM PETIIT FELICIOR ASTRIS
 HIC CLAVDOR DANTES PATRIIS EXTORRIS AB ORIS
 QVEM GENVIT PARVI FLORENTIA MATER AMORIS.

Of which this rude paraphrase may serve as a translation: —

The rights of Monarchy, the Heavens, the Stream of Fire, the Pit,
 In vision seen, I sang as far as to the Fates seemed fit;
 But since my soul, an alien here, hath flown to nobler wars,
 And, happier now, hath gone to seek its Maker 'mid the stars,
 Here am I, Dante, shut, exiled from the ancestral shore,
 Whom Florence, the of all least-loving mother, bore.

Giovanni Villani, a contemporary of Dante, thus sketches him: "This man was a great scholar in almost every science, though a layman; was a most excellent poet, philosopher, and rhetorician; perfect, as well in composing and versifying as in haranguing; a most noble speaker. . . . This Dante, on account of his learning, was a little haughty, and shy, and disdainful, and, like a philosopher almost ungracious, knew not well how to deal with unlettered folk." Benvenuto da Imola tells us that he was very abstracted. Boccaccio paints him in this wise: "Our poet was of middle height; his face was long, his nose aquiline, his jaw large, and the lower lip protruding somewhat beyond the upper; a little stooping in the shoulders; his eyes rather large than small; dark of complexion; his hair and beard thick, crisp, and black; and his countenance always sad and thoughtful. His garments were always dignified, the style such as suited ripeness of years; his gait was grave and gentlemanlike; and his bearing, whether public or private, wonderfully composed and polite. In meat and drink he was most temperate, nor was ever any more zealous in study or whatever other pursuit. He spoke seldom, save when spoken to, though a most elo-

quent person. In his youth he delighted especially in music and singing, and was intimate with almost all the singers and musicians of his day. He was much inclined to solitude, and familiar with few, and most assiduous in study as far as he could find time for it. Dante was also of marvellous capacity and the most tenacious memory." Various anecdotes of him are related by Boccaccio, Sacchetti, and others, none of them probable, and some of them at least fifteen centuries old when revamped. One clear glimpse we get of him from the *Ottimo Comento*, the author of which says, "I, the writer, heard Dante say that never a rhyme had led him to say other than he would, but that many a time and oft he had made words say for him what they were not wont to express for other poets."

Looked at outwardly, the life of Dante seems to have been an utter and disastrous failure. What its inward satisfactions must have been, we, with the *Paradiso* open before us, can form some faint conception. To him, longing with an intensity which only the word *Dantesque* will express, to realize an ideal upon earth, and continually baffled and misunderstood, the far greater part of his mature life must have been labor and sorrow. At the end of the *Vita Nuova*, his first work, Dante wrote down the aspiration that God would take him to himself after he had written of Beatrice such things as were never yet written of woman. It was literally fulfilled when the *Commedia* was finished, twenty-five years later.

Scarce was Dante at rest in his grave when Italy felt instinctively that this was her great man. In 1329 Cardinal Poggetto caused Dante's treatise *De Monarchia* to be publicly burned at Bologna, and proposed further to dig up and burn the bones of the poet at Ravenna, on the ground that he was a heretic; but so much opposition was roused that he thought better of it. Yet this was during the pontificate of John XXII., the reproof of whose simony Dante puts in the mouth of St. Peter, who declares his seat vacant, whose

damnation the poet himself seems to prophesy, and against whose election he had endeavored to persuade the Cardinals in a vehement letter. In 1350 the republic of Florence voted ten golden florins to be paid to Dante's daughter Beatrice, a nun in the convent of Santa Chiara at Ravenna. In 1396 Florence voted a monument, and begged in vain for the metaphorical ashes of the man of whom she had threatened to make literal cinders if she could catch him alive. In 1429 she begged again, but Ravenna, a dead city, was tenacious of the dead poet. In 1519 Michel Angelo would have built the monument, but Leo X. refused to allow the sacred dust to be removed. Finally, in 1829, five hundred and eight years after the death of Dante, Florence got a cenotaph fairly built in Santa Croce, ugly beyond even the usual lot of such, with three colossal figures on it: Dante in the middle, Italy on one side, and Poesy on the other. The tomb at Ravenna, built originally in 1483, by Cardinal Bembo, was restored by Cardinal Corsi in 1692, and finally rebuilt in its present form by Cardinal Gonzaga in 1780, all three of whom commemorated themselves in Latin inscriptions. It is a little shrine covered with a dome, not unlike the tomb of a Mohammedan saint, and has been the chief magnet which draws foreigners and their gold to Ravenna. In May, 1865, Ravenna, in common with all Italy, celebrated the six hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dante; and in preparing for the festival, a chest containing the bones of the poet was discovered concealed in a cavity near the mausoleum, where they had been hidden in the seventeenth century under an apprehension that they might be stolen by the Florentines. They were examined by a committee, pronounced to be genuine, and reinterred in the mausoleum. At Florence the anniversary was celebrated with great pomp, and on May 14 of the following year a colossal statue of the poet was erected in the square of Santa Croce.

In 1373 (August 9) Florence instituted a chair of the *Divina Commedia*, and Boccaccio was named first Professor.

He accordingly began his lectures on Sunday, October 3, following, but his comment was broken off abruptly at the seventeenth verse of the seventeenth canto of the *Inferno* by the illness which ended in his death, December 21, 1375. Among his successors were Filippo Villani and Filelfo. Bologna was the first to follow the example of Florence, Benvenuto da Imola having begun his lectures, according to Tiraboschi, as early as 1375. Chairs were established also at Pisa, Venice, Piacenza, and Milan before the close of the century. The lectures were delivered in the churches and on feast days. Balbo reckons that the manuscript copies of the *Divina Commedia* made during the fourteenth century, and now existing in the libraries of Europe, are more numerous than those of any other work, ancient or modern, made during the same period. Between the invention of printing, and the year 1500, more than twenty editions were published in Italy, the earliest in 1472. During the sixteenth century there were forty editions; during the seventeenth, a period for Italy of sceptical dilettanteism, only three; during the eighteenth, thirty-four; and during the first half of the nineteenth, at least eighty.

The first translation is said to have been into Spanish prose, by Don Enrique de Villena, in 1428. Of nearly the same date was a translation into Catalan by Febrer. M. Saint-René Taillandier says that the *Commedia* was condemned by the Inquisition in Spain; but according to Foscolo it was only the commentary of Landino and Vellutello, and a few verses in the *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, which were condemned. The first French translation was that of Grangier (1596); but the study of Dante struck no root in France till the present century. Rivarol, who translated the *Inferno* in 1783, was the first Frenchman to divine the wonderful force and vitality of the *Commedia*. The expressions of Voltaire represent very well the opinion of cultivated persons in respect of Dante in the middle of the eighteenth century. He says: "The Italians

call him divine; but it is a hidden divinity; few people understand his oracles. He has commentators, which perhaps is another reason for his not being understood. His reputation will go on increasing, because scarce anybody reads him." To Father Bettinelli he writes: "I estimate highly the courage with which you have dared to say that Dante was a madman and his work a monster." But he adds: "There are found among us, and in the eighteenth century, people who strive to admire imaginations so stupidly extravagant and barbarous." Elsewhere he says that the *Commedia* was "an odd poem, but gleaming with natural beauties, a work in which the author rose in parts above the bad taste of his age and his subject, and full of passages written as purely as if they had been of the time of Ariosto and Tasso." It is curious to see the fascination which Dante exercised over a nature so opposite to his own. At the beginning of this century Chateaubriand speaks of Dante with vague commendation, evidently from a very superficial acquaintance, and that only with the *Inferno*, probably from Rivarol's version. Since then there have been several French versions in prose or verse, including one by Lamennais. But the austerity of Dante will not condescend to the conventional elegance which makes the charm of French, and the most virile of poets cannot be adequately rendered in the most feminine of languages. Yet in the works of Fauriel, Ozanam, Ampère, and Villemain, France has given a greater impulse to the study of Dante than any other country except Germany. Into Germany the *Commedia* penetrated later. How utterly Dante was unknown there in the sixteenth century is plain from a passage in the "Vanity of the Arts and Sciences" of Cornelius Agrippa, where he is spoken of among the authors of lascivious stories. The first German translation was that of Kannegiesser (1809). Versions by Streckfuss, Kopisch, and Prince John (afterward King) of Saxony followed. Goethe seems never to have given that attention to Dante which he might have been expected to

bestow on so imposing a moral and æsthetic phenomenon. Unless the conclusion of the Second Part of "Faust" be an inspiration of the *Paradiso*, there is no adequate word from him on this theme. His remarks on one of the German translations are brief, dry, and without that breadth which comes only of thorough knowledge and sympathy. But German scholarship and constructive criticism, through Witte, Kopisch, Wegele, Ruth, and others, have been of pre-eminent service in deepening the understanding and facilitating the study of the poet.

In England, the first recognition of Dante is by Chaucer in the "Hugelin of Pisa" of the "Monkes Tale," and an imitation of the opening verses of the third canto of the *Inferno* ("Assembly of Foules"). In 1417 Giovanni da Serravalle, Bishop of Fermo, completed a Latin prose translation of the *Commedia*, a copy of which was doubtless sent to England. Later, we find Dante now and then mentioned, but evidently from hearsay only, till the time of Milton, who shows that he had read his works closely. Thenceforward for more than a century Dante became a mere name, used without meaning by literary sciolists. Lord Chesterfield echoes Voltaire, and Dr. Drake spoke of Darwin's "Botanic Garden" as showing the "wild and terrible sublimity of Dante"! The first complete English translation was by Boyd, of the *Inferno* in 1785, of the whole poem in 1802. Cary's admirable, but too Miltonic, version appeared in 1814, and several other translations within a few years after. But it is only since 1840 that the study of Dante has become at all general.

In America Professor Ticknor was the first to devote a special course of lectures to Dante. He was followed by Longfellow, in a course of lectures, accompanied by translations. In 1843 Parsons printed the first ten cantos of the *Inferno*, rendered into quatrains. Since then Longfellow has translated the entire *Divina Commedia*, and Parsons the whole of the *Inferno* and portions of the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. In

Denmark and Russia translations of the *Inferno* have been published, besides separate volumes of comment and illustration. The veneration of Dantophilists for their master is that of disciples for their saint. Perhaps no other man could have called forth such an expression as that of Ruskin, that "the central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante."

The writings of Dante are all (with the possible exception of the treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia*) autobiographic, and all of them, including that, are parts of a mutually related system, of which the central point is the individuality and experience of the poet. In the *Vita Nuova* he recounts the story of his love for Beatrice Portinari, showing how his grief for her loss turned his thoughts first inward upon his own consciousness, and, failing all help there, gradually upward through philosophy to religion, and so from a world of shadows to one of eternal substances. It traces with exquisite unconsciousness the gradual but certain steps by which memory and imagination transubstantiated the woman of flesh and blood into a holy ideal, combining in one radiant symbol of sorrow and hope the faith which is the instinctive refuge of unavailing regret, the grace of God which higher natures learn to find in the trial which passeth all understanding, and that perfect womanhood, the dream of youth and the memory of maturity, which beckons toward the forever unattainable. As a contribution to the physiology of genius, no other book is to be compared with the *Vita Nuova*. It is more important to the understanding of Dante as a poet than any other of his works. It enables us to see how, from being the slave of his imaginative faculty, he rose by self-culture and force of will to that mastery of it which is art. We comprehend the *Commedia* better when we know that Dante could be an active, clear-headed politician and a mystic at the same time. Various dates have been assigned to the composition of the *Vita*

Nuova. The earliest limit is fixed by the death of Beatrice in 1299 (though some of the poems are of prior date), and the book is commonly assumed to have been finished by 1295; but Witte extends the term as far as 1300. The title of the book also, *Vita Nuova*, has been diversely interpreted. Mr. Garrow, who published an English version of it at Florence in 1846, entitles it "The Early Life of Dante." Balbo understands it in the same way. But we are of the opinion that "New Life" is the interpretation sustained by the entire significance of the book itself.

It has been generally taken for granted that Dante was a Guelph in politics up to the time of his banishment, and that out of resentment he then became a violent Ghibelline. Not to speak of the consideration that there is no author whose life and works present so remarkable a unity and logical sequence as those of Dante, Witte has drawn attention to a fact which alone is enough to demonstrate that the *De Monarchia* was written before 1300. That and the *Vita Nuova* are the only works of Dante in which no allusion whatever is made to his exile. That bitter thought was continually present to him. In the *Convito* it betrays itself often, and with touching unexpectedness. Even in the treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, he refers to it more than once and takes as one of his examples of style, "I have most pity for those, whosoever they are, that languish in exile, and revisit their country only in dreams." We have seen that the one decisive act of Dante's priorate was to expel from Florence the chiefs of both parties as the sowers of strife, and he tells us that he had formed a party by himself. The King of Saxony has well defined his political theory as being "an ideal Ghibellinism." Dante's want of faith in freedom was of the same kind with Milton's refusing to confound license with liberty. The argument of the *De Monarchia* is briefly this: As the object of the individual man is the highest development of his faculties, so is it also with men united in societies. But the individual can

only attain that highest development when all his powers are in absolute subjection to the intellect, and society only when it subjects its individual caprices to an intelligent head. This is the order of nature, as in families, and men have followed it in the organization of villages, towns, cities. Again, since God made man in his own image, men and societies most nearly resemble him in proportion as they approach unity. But as in all societies questions must arise, so there is need of a monarch for supreme arbiter. And only a universal monarch can be impartial enough for this, since kings of limited territories would always be liable to the temptation of private ends. With the internal policy of municipalities, commonwealths, and kingdoms, the monarch should have nothing to do, only interfering when there was danger of an infraction of the general peace. This is the doctrine of the first book, enforced sometimes eloquently, always logically, and with great fertility of illustration. It is an enlargement of some of the *obiter dicta* of the *Convito*. The earnestness with which peace is insisted on as a necessary postulate of civic well-being shows what the experience had been out of which Dante had constructed his theory. It is to be looked on as a purely scholastic demonstration of a speculative thesis, in which the manifold exceptions and modifications essential in practical application are necessarily left aside. Dante almost forestalls the famous proposition of Calvin, "that it is possible to conceive a people without a prince, but not a prince without a people," when he says, *Non enim gens propter regem, sed e converso rex propter gentem*. And in his letter to the princes and peoples of Italy on the coming of Henry VII. he bids them "obey their prince, but so as freemen preserving their own constitutional forms." He says also expressly: *Animadvertendum sane, quod cum dicitur humanum genus potest regi per unum supremum principem, non sic intelligendum est ut ab illo uno prodire possint municipia et leges municipales. Habent namque nationes, regna, et civitates inter se proprietates*

quas legibus differentibus regulari oportet. Schlosser compares Dante's system with that of the United States. In some respects it resembles more the constitution of the Netherlands under the supreme Stadtholder, but parallels between ideal and actual institutions are always unsatisfactory. The second book is very curious. In it Dante endeavors to demonstrate the divine right of the Roman Empire to the universal sovereignty. One of his arguments is, that Christ consented to be born under the reign of Augustus; another, that he assented to its jurisdiction in allowing himself to be crucified under a decree of one of its courts. The atonement could not have been accomplished unless Christ suffered under sentence of a court having jurisdiction, for otherwise his condemnation would have been an injustice, and not a penalty. Moreover, since all mankind was typified in the person of Christ, the court must have been one having jurisdiction over all mankind; and since he was delivered to Pilate, an officer of Tiberius, it must follow that the jurisdiction of Tiberius was universal. He draws an argument also from the wager of battle to prove that the Roman Empire was divinely permitted, at least, if not instituted. For since it is admitted that God gives the victory, and since the Romans always won it, therefore it was God's will that the Romans should attain universal empire. In the third book he endeavors to prove that the Emperor holds by divine right, and not by permission of the Pope. He assigns supremacy to the Pope in spirituals, and to the Emperor in temporals. This was a delicate subject, and though the King of Saxony (a Catholic) says that Dante did not overstep the limits of orthodoxy, it was on account of this part of the book that it was condemned as heretical.

Though we have doubts whether we possess the treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia* as Dante wrote it, inclining rather to think that it is a copy in some parts textually exact, in others an abstract, there can be no question either of its great glossological value, or that it conveys the opinions of Dante.

We put it next in order, though written later than the *Convito*, only because, like the *De Monarchia*, it is written in Latin. It is a proof of the national instinct of Dante, and of his confidence in his genius, that he should have chosen to write all his greatest works in what was deemed by scholars a *patois*, but which he more than any other man made a classic language. Had he intended the *De Monarchia* for a political pamphlet, he would certainly not have composed it in the dialect of the few. The *De Vulgari Eloquentia* was to have been in four books. Whether it was ever finished it is impossible to say, but only two books have come down to us. It treats of poetizing in the vulgar tongue, and of the different dialects of Italy. The Florentines have denied its authenticity, because it does not allow the supremacy of the Tuscan. From the particularity with which it treats of the dialect of Bologna, it has been supposed to have been written in that city, or at least to furnish an argument in favor of Dante's having at some time studied there. In Lib. II. cap. 2, is a remarkable passage, in which, defining the various subjects of song and what had been treated in the vulgar tongue by different poets, he says that his own theme had been righteousness.

The *Convito* is also imperfect. It was to have consisted of fourteen treatises, but, as we have it, contains only four. In the first, he justifies the use of the vulgar idiom in preference to the Latin. In the other three, he comments on three of his own *Canzoni*. It is an epitome of the learning of the age, philosophical, theological, and scientific. As affording illustration of the *Commedia*, and of Dante's style of thought, it is invaluable. It is reckoned by his countrymen the first piece of Italian prose, and there are parts of it which still stand unmatched for eloquence and pathos. The Italians find in it and a few passages of the *Commedia* the proof that Dante as a natural philosopher was wholly in advance of his age; that he had, among other things, anticipated Newton in

the theory of gravitation. But this is as idle as the claim that Shakespeare had discovered the circulation of the blood before Harvey; and one might as well attempt to dethrone Newton because Chaucer speaks of the love which draws the apple to the earth. The truth is, it was only as a poet that Dante was great and original, and in matters of science, like all his contemporaries, he sought the guiding hand of Aristotle. Dante is assumed by many to have been a Platonist, but this is not true in the strict sense of the word. Like all men of great imagination, he was an idealist, but his direct acquaintance with Plato may be reckoned as nothing; and we consider it as having strongly influenced his artistic development for the better, that, transcendentalist as he was by nature, his habits of thought should have been made precise, and his genius disciplined, by a mind so severely logical as that of Aristotle. This does not conflict with what we believe to be equally true, that the Platonizing commentaries on his poem, like that of Landino, are the most satisfactory.

Besides the prose already mentioned, we have a small collection of Dante's letters, the recovery of the larger number of which we owe to Professor Witte. They are all interesting, some of them especially so, as illustrating the prophetic character with which Dante invested himself. The longest is addressed to Can Grande della Scala, explaining the intention of the *Commedia* and the method to be employed in its interpretation.

Dante's minor poems, full of grace and depth of mystic sentiment, would have given him a high place in the history of Italian literature, even had he written nothing else. They are so abstract, however, that without the extrinsic interest of having been written by the author of the *Commedia*, they would probably find few readers.

All that is certainly known in regard to the *Commedia* is that it was composed during the nineteen years between Dante's banishment and his death. Attempts have been

made to fix precisely the dates of the different parts, but without success. Foscolo has constructed an ingenious argument to show that no part of the poem was published before the author's death. The question depends somewhat on the meaning we attach to the word published. In an age of manuscript, the wide dispersion of a poem so long even as a single one of the three divisions of the *Commedia* would be accomplished very slowly. But it is difficult to account for the great fame which Dante enjoyed during the latter years of his life, unless we suppose that parts at least of his greatest work had been read or heard by a large number of persons. This, however, need not imply publication; and Witte supposes even the *Inferno* not to have been finished before 1314 or 1315. In a matter where certainty is impossible, it is useless to reproduce conjectural dates. In the letter to Can Grande before alluded to, Dante himself has stated the theme of his song. He says that "the literal subject of the whole work is the state of the soul after death simply considered. But if the work be taken allegorically, the subject is man, as by merit or demerit, through freedom of the will, he renders himself liable to the reward or punishment of justice." He tells us that the work is to be interpreted in a literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical sense, a mode then commonly employed with the Scriptures, and of which he gives the following example: "To make which mode of treatment more clear, it may be applied in the following verses: *In exitu Israel de Ægypto, domus Jacob de populo barbaro, facta est Judæa sanctificatio ejus, Israel potestas ejus.* For if we look only at the literal sense, it signifies the going out of the children of Israel from Egypt in the time of Moses; if at the allegorical, it signifies our redemption through Christ; if at the moral, it signifies the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin to a state of grace; and if at the anagogical, it signifies the passage of the blessed soul from the bondage of this corruption to the freedom of eternal glory."

Dante tells us that he calls his poem a Comedy because it has a fortunate ending, and gives its title thus: "Here begins the Comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth, but not in morals." The poem consists of three parts, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Each part is divided into thirty-three cantos, in allusion to the years of the Saviour's life, for though the Hell contains thirty-four, the first canto is merely introductory. In the form of the verse (triple rhyme) we may find an emblem of the Trinity, and in the three divisions, of the three-fold state of man, sin, grace, and beatitude. Symbolic meanings reveal themselves, or make themselves suspected, everywhere, as in the architecture of the Middle Ages.

If we except Wolfram von Eschenbach, Dante is the first Christian poet whose whole system of thought is colored in every finest fibre by a purely Christian theology. Lapse through sin, mediation, and redemption are the subjects of the three parts of the poem; or, otherwise stated, intellectual conviction of the result of sin, typified in Virgil; moral conversion after repentance, by divine grace, typified in Beatrice; reconciliation with God, and actual blinding vision of him ("the pure in heart shall see God"). The model of the poem is that of the Christian basilica: the ethnic forecourt of those who know not God; the purgatorial middle space of repentance, confession, and absolution; the altar of reconciliation, beyond and over which hangs the emblem of the Mediator, of the divine made human, that the human might learn how to become divine. Here are general rules which any Christian man may accept and find comfort in. But the poem comes nearer to us than this. It is the real history of a brother man, of a tempted, purified, and at last triumphant human soul; it teaches the benign ministry of sorrow, and that the ladder of that faith by which man climbs to the actual fruition of things not seen *ex quovis ligno non fit*, but only of the cross manfully borne. The poem is also an

apotheosis of woman. In the *Commedia* the image of the Middle Ages, and the sentimental woman-worship of chivalry, which was at best skin-deep, is lifted in Beatrice to an ideal and universal plane. It is the same with Catholicism, with Imperialism, with the Scholastic Philosophy; and nothing is more wonderful than the power of absorption and assimilation in this man, who could take up into himself the world that then was and reproduce it with such cosmopolitan truth to human nature, and to his own individuality, as to reduce all contemporary history to a mere comment on his vision. Like all great artistic minds, Dante was essentially conservative, and, coming upon the stage of action precisely in that period of transition when Church and Empire were entering upon the modern epoch of thought, he strove to preserve both by presenting the theory of both in a pristine and ideal perfection. The whole nature of Dante was one of intense belief. There is proof upon proof that he believed himself invested with a divine mission. Like the Hebrew prophets, it was back to the old worship and the God of the fathers that he called his people. In Dante's time, learning had something of a sacred character; the line was hardly yet drawn between the clerk and the possessor of supernatural powers. It was with the next generation, with the elegant Petrarch, even more truly than with the kindly Boccaccio, that the purely literary life and that dilettanteism which is the twin sister of scepticism began.

As a merely literary figure, the position of Dante is remarkable. Not only as respects thought, but as respects æsthetics also, his great poem stands a monument on the boundary line between the ancient and modern. He not only marks, but is in himself, the transition. *Arma virumque cano*, that is the motto of classic song; the things of this world and great men. Dante says, *Subjectum est homo*, not *vir*; *My theme is man*, not *a man*. The scene of the old epic and drama was in this world, and its catastrophe here; Dante

lays his scene in the human soul, and his fifth act in the other world. He makes himself the chief actor of his own drama. In the *Commedia* for the first time Christianity wholly revolutionizes art, and becomes its seminal principle. But æsthetically also, as well as morally, Dante stands between the old and new, and reconciles them. The theme of his poem is purely subjective, modern, what is called romantic; but its treatment is objective (almost to realism, here and there), and it is limited by a form of classic severity. In the same way he sums up in himself the two schools of modern poetry which had preceded him, and, while essentially lyrical in his subject, is epic in the handling of it. So also he combines the deeper and more abstract religious sentiment of the Teutonic races with the scientific precision and absolute systematism of the Romanic.

In one respect Dante stands alone. While we can in some sort account for such representative men as Voltaire and Goethe, or even Shakespeare, by the intellectual and moral fermentation of the age in which they lived, Dante seems morally isolated, and to have drawn his inspiration almost wholly from his own internal resources. Of his mastery in style we need say little here. Of his mere language, nothing could be better than the expression of Rivarol: "His verse holds itself erect by the mere force of the substantive and verb, without the help of a single epithet." In all literary history there is no such figure as Dante, no such homogeneity of life and works, such loyalty to idea, and such sublime irrecognition of the unessential; and there is no moral more touching than that the contemporary recognition of such a nature, so endowed and so faithful to its endowment, should be summed up in the sentence of Florence: *Igne comburatur sic quod moriatur.*